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ABSTRACT

In interview excerpts, three teachers at Dowa Yalanne Elementary School on the Zuni Indian Reservation discuss ways they use community resources to help their students learn. The teachers explain the importance of introducing concepts by grounding them in familiar activities from home and community. They suggest that, for them, the "basics" of education are sensory input, oral language, sharing, and problem solving. Class activities that integrate school, home, and community are described: (1) outdoor walks to observe the change of seasons and to collect "beach sand" for understanding stories about sandcastle building; (2) biscuit making (Anglo) to teach measurement and tortilla making (Zuni) to teach estimation; (3) building little pueblos from stones and mud; (4) painting on sandstones with homemade dyes; (5) teaching shapes from traditional geometric designs on clothing; (6) taping children's stories in Zuni; (7) journal keeping; and (8) discussing Easter and Christmas and whether or not those Anglo traditions are relevant to different Zuni families. (SV)

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Integrating Home and Community Into the Curriculum: The Zuni Experience

An Interview With

Margaret Eriacho, Kaylene Gchachu and Odell Jaramillo

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Integrating Home and Community Into the Curriculum: The Zuni Experience

In the following interview excerpts, Margaret Eriacho, Kaylene Gchachu, and Odell Jaramillo, teachers at the Dowa Yalanne Elementary School on the Zuni Indian Reservation, discuss ways they use community resources to help children learn. Elizabeth Franklin, the Editor of Insights, has organized and edited both the interview questions as well as the teachers' comments.

E: Why is it important to utilize community resources in your curriculum?

O: I think it is important to bring in concepts using your own native language. And to take the children into our homes so they can see our moms doing things like baking bread. We try to value the language and the traditional ways.

M: I think what we're all saying is (that it's important) to start with the familiar and build from that. You then extend into other areas.

K: If you know the history of schools and Indians—a lot of times they have become very separate. There was a big difference between home and school. Now what we're trying to do is bridge that gap again and make it integrated. (We want) the kids to feel that they are valuable as Zuni people and that their ideas from home are valuable and should be used in school.

E: What are some of the activities you do that integrate school, home, and community?

M: During this time of the year (spring) it's always fun to go down to the river. That's where we collect our "beach" sand in order to help children understand stories about building sandcastles. Sandcastle building is very foreign to them. As we go (to the river), we take the long way around so that we can make observations of what's happening in the spring. By taking pictures, the kids can see that the willows are down there and we walk through those willows. For some of our children that are hesitant to make even that single path, it's real fun to see how they maneuver themselves through those willows. And then later on in the year we'll go down again and we'll take pictures and this time the willows are all in bloom so that they can see that transition of spring to become summer. And (when we get to the river), we collect sand.

K: The kids enjoy being there. We make them dig down deep for the moist sand. Our kids need that actual experience, digging with their hands, having to feel, take off their shoes. It's a nice idea. It's a nice way. Ninety-five percent of the time when you start digging, you find roots. You're going to find something always to bring home and to bring back to the classroom. And you can peel some of those roots. You make little bows and arrows or if they're real long, use it for the concept of the line—the long, longer, longest line—and see what they can form.

M: You can see they are learning about the willows, different seasonal changes in colors as well as learning about the different sizes of roots. They get a good idea about seasons. And from that you go into story writing and watching videotapes on seasons.

K: And when they read stories about the "beach" or about building sand- castles (they can think to themselves), "Oh, we did that." They have a concrete base. I'm also a big fan of cooking and I'll just relate one experience we've had with biscuits. Because about two years ago nobody knew what a biscuit was. That was an Anglo kind of bread that the kids weren't real familiar with. And there wasn't even a Zuni bread that related to the idea of biscuits. So we made biscuits and I used that experience to teach measuring and (to teach) different concepts in science and math. Then, when it came to making tortillas, we didn't use our measuring spoons and we didn't use our measuring cups. It's all estimation and you have your ingredients that you measure in the palm of your hand instead of in a measuring spoon and that's the way they see it at home. And we compared the different ways of making bread. And we had a boy and girl cooking and their hand motions, the way that they rolled out their dough, everything was just as I have seen my sisters-in-law do it and I try to do it. [laugh] And then I asked them if they have ever cooked tortillas at home and both of them said, "No, but we watch." They knew the movements. They were within them to make them because they'd observed so much at home. And it would feel very strange to use measuring spoons and that to make tortillas. So there are just different styles of cooking that you have to accept when you're doing traditional foods as compared to the cookbook foods. And each teaches different concepts.

M: We have what is called stove bread. That's similar to biscuits except the shape is different. We don't use a dough cutter; we just slice it.

E: What are some art activities that build on what is familiar?

K: We usually take a trip out on these flat sandstone rocks that you find all around. They're ideal building blocks. You can use them for constructing little pueblos and then just get your mud and then you need your straw and sticks. We pick up those real flat sandstone rocks and paint all different kinds of designs. Some of the older brothers and sisters of the kids in the room are doing a lot of painting. They're artists, you know, painting on the slabs of sandstones and so we do the same.

M: We also took them up to El Morro. They saw this painting on the mountains and on the cliffs and they just wondered how it got there and why, when it rains, the paint doesn't come off. So we thought, "What was it?" (We used) carrot leaf and onion skins and made dyes, different kinds of dyes. It was around springtime when (there is) all this weed stuff, and we kind of throw everything together and boil it. And cedar was one of the smells they just couldn't stand. But it turns yellow.

E: How did you learn to do all this? To make those dyes?

O: Oh, I guess just from being from here. You know, you see a lot of things. I myself have drunk cedar water after having a baby. It's just part of the practices that I have grown up with.

M: And it's familiar to use, but it would be very difficult for another teacher because the familiarity is not there. You have to be really comfortable with what you're doing in order to give it to your children.

E: Any other art projects?

O: Zuni is a place where they have dances all year round and then for another art project I tell them to go watch a dance and then we talk about it—the designs that they saw, that they wore. You know, how did it look—the triangles, the rectangles. What kinds of shapes did they see? Instead of just talking about the dancers and their singing, I talked about their religion. Little boys, especially at kindergarten, they're not really exposed, they're not initiated, so there's a limited amount of what they can say or of what they can do. I also wanted them to get into shapes and knowing the sashes, making them with yarns. We make sashes, belts and stufflike that. And there's the symbol and meaning of the rain cloud and then the sun and different things. We get back into language. Before there was language there were symbols that people used to talk with and so we show them the patterns that they used for the sun and the rainbow, too.

M: And there's always a sequence of patterns.

E: What about the jewelry? You said that sometimes you take them to your house.

O: There's different kinds of jewelry. There's inlaid and it looks like this. And there's needle point and cluster and overlay. Then we take them to a little jewelry store to look at jewelry and they say, "Oh, my dad makes that kind," or, "my mom does this." So then we take them to my house and we show them the different kinds of tools we use. They get to feel the tweezers and then comment on the nose. Is it a long nose? Or a flat nose? What kind of nose do I have? [Laughter]. So (they learn about) different kinds of noses, different meanings. Then they watch my mother demonstrate things like broche-making.

K: My sister-in-law developed a book when she was in a Zuni parent program on metal-smithing. She has developed actual activities that go from the very easy to the very sophisticated using nickel-plate which is a lot cheaper than real silver. It's been used in the upper grades quite a lot.

E: What do you do to tie reading and writing into community resources?

O: OK. Well I'm doing *Brown Bear* using Zuni words for different kinds of foods and colors. We tried to include traditional kinds of foods in the book that most children have been exposed to. Most of them didn't know what blue cornmeal pancake was so we went through the whole process of bringing in blue corn and roasting and grinding it. After that we made the corn meal and then we made some pancakes with it. Children got to see what we put in it. And then we make five other things with the blue corn meal.

E: OK. And so then you just kind of write a whole new book of *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*.

O: Yes. And we use the Zuni words for the food. And then we color it using the Zuni words for colors. The whole book is in Zuni. And then we put it on tape. Most of our stories we put on tape.

K: For the Zuni-speaking children, they tell their stories on tape and then we use them at the listening center. Other

children then draw their own interpretations of the story. Printed materials in Zuni have been developed through second grade. But you have to use the language in upper grades, too.

M: There are very few upper grade teachers who are Zuni or who have a Zuni base. That's something we need to think about as a community.

E: Anything else?

K: Well, if you go on a field trip, you see where baby animals are. The kids will tell you where baby animals are and they know kinds of baby animals. And so when it comes to writing we're going to brainstorm for our list of words. And we use their words. They know where their words are. If they only give us two words, then we'll say, "OK. Well I want four. We're going to write and make a book with four words." So you see, it's already in them. They already know a lot about baby animals. We just use it in their writing.

M: Afterwards we keep their story. Then they have two things to do. They have to read their book and they have to share what they've read and written. There's always a lot of conversation going, a lot of helping each other. And we always have a large group sharing time or they choose to read a book with someone.

E: Any other reading or writing activities?

M: With the amount of literature these children get, they learn a lot. We get these pink slips from the office and we say, "Tony, here's your note. Read it to me." He'll say, "Walk to your grandmother's house." Somebody will chime in, "Don't pick any flowers. Don't break any rules." [Laughter]. They think of the fairy tale (*Little Red Riding Hood*). They give you back the language that they learned.

With all our field trips or our cooking activities, there's always literature than can go with what we're doing. And so you either take dictation or now our children are into writing their own books. Whether they use a pattern or make a counting book, they're involved in different kinds of writing activities.

K: Some of them are just at the labeling stage and so they would have a lot of things to label that are relevant to them, that mean something to them.

O: It's interesting because I started this year with just dictation. Now I say, "Let's take turns," and then I'll say, "It'll be your turn now, to do your own story." So at this time of the year some of them have the beginning sounds and they're really starting their own journals. We don't even help them with their spelling.

E: You don't help them with spelling at all.

O: They bring their journals and we respond to them and we watch them. Some of them do invented spelling. They do whatever letters or words they know, their name, or their sister's name. Every day after they write they reread their story. And then they tell us, "Oh, I like flying my kite," and then we write a question, "How high does your kite fly?" "Very high?" Or "300 feet?" And then they're on their own. Sometimes now they'll know how to spell "yes" and "no" and everything is "yes" and "no" all over. [Laughter].

M: We brainstorm and we work on word banks. And at this time of the year, the children are reading and they're looking at beginning, ending, and middle sounds.

When it comes to writing time, they can look and see the words in their word banks.

E: How do you answer the critics of schools who say teachers need to go back to the basics?

K: Then you have to define what are the basics. When you have defined in your mind what the basics are, you are still doing the same thing that we're doing right now. That's my feeling. I agree. We should teach the basics. My idea of the basics is sensory input, oral language, sharing. It's not reading out of a book that has very little meaning to me.

M: I think problem-solving is also important. What most people who talk about the basics are thinking is basically about books. You get the reading book, a math book. We don't even give our children math books to start with until towards the middle part of the year. We then give them a book and say, "OK, go to it." Of course by then we've already done the building. And a lot of kids are good with numbers.

K: You're bringing in the higher level of thinking when you put the skills together. In cooking or in any of the activities (we've mentioned today), you have the basics, but you've extended into higher levels of problem-solving.

E: Do you do anything with holiday celebrations and holiday art?

M: I'll do Easter baskets tomorrow. You see, this is not a holiday that's relevant to all Zuni people.

K: But the problem, though, is that it's so commercialized and the kids are so into it. You have to recognize that it's part of their culture even though it's not directly part of their culture. Because through television and through commercials, and through grocery stores, everywhere, it's so promoted that if you would not do anything it's telling them they're not part of the mainstream culture too. That's just as bad as telling them they're not part of the Zuni culture.

M: What I'm talking about is when in mainstream America they say, "When you wake up Easter morning you have to look for your Easter eggs." For our children, that's not going to happen to them.

K: No.

M: Rather than build them up for nothing, we'll do our dying. They'll get a real kick out of that. And we'll make our baskets, but the focus is using the language. We talk about rabbits. They're into reading about rabbits, about springtime. At other times we'll ask, "What is the meaning of the whole Easter season?" You don't say, "Oh, this is the meaning of the whole Easter season." You say, "Some people, some places, believe there's an Easter Bunny. Some people don't." And then you have to show them different places. You can say, "How does your family do this?" And it's the same thing with Santa Claus. Every year we have the same discussion, "Is Santa Claus real?" And there are kids, Zuni children, who believe very much that, "No, there is not a Santa Claus because I don't get anything from Santa Claus." And then another child says, "Well I do," and we have to go through the debate of how you feel about it and how other people around the world feel about it.

E: Thanks very much.

Margaret Eriacho teaches first grade at Dowa Yalanne Elementary School on the Zuni Indian Reservation.

Kaylene Gchachu, a former first and second grade teacher at Dowa Yalanne Elementary School, now coordinates the Teen Parenting Program at the Twin Buttes Alternative High School in Zuni.

Odell Jaramillo teaches kindergarten at Dowa Yalanne Elementary School.

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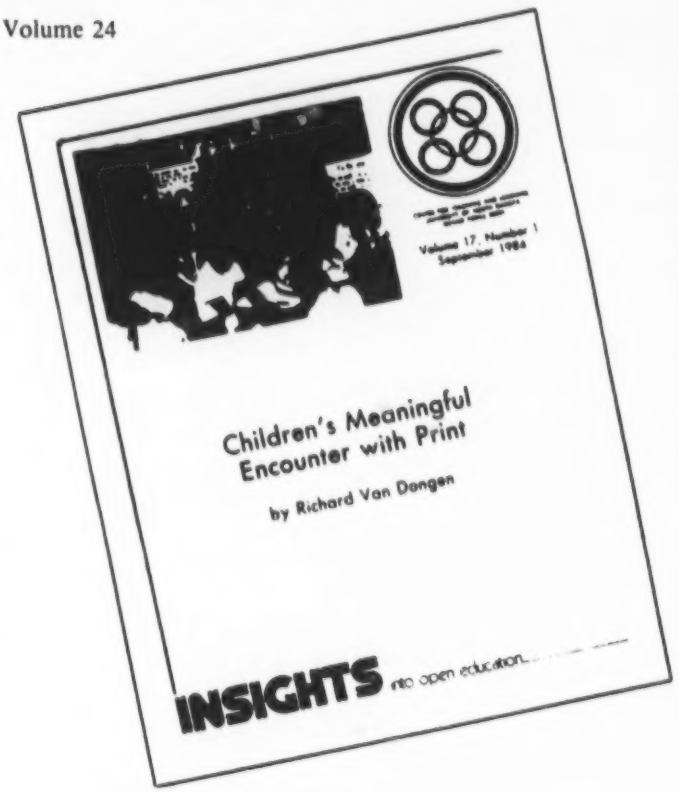

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